

Black Rose

by Ye Jin and Yesmi

PROLOGUE

Torrents of snowflakes rain down upon him, peppering his face with icy freckles. The blizzard is stronger now. It caresses his skin, draping his body in a cloak of white. He doesn't exactly remember how he got here; something about bread, and a bakery. But that doesn't matter now.

A forest materialises in the almost tangible sheen of fog, glowing in the blinding light of the Aurora Borealis. It's like a tiny island in the otherwise impenetrable sea of darkness. He wades through the snow towards it like a starved wolf. It calls out to him, barely a whisper amidst the hurricane-like winds.

But something stops the boy. A tiny speck of black dances through the air, like a tiny rip in a thick blanket of snow. It's like a blot of ink splattered on a white canvas. It crashes towards the ground, exploding into a thousand tiny slivers of light.

The boy stares at it in awe, mesmerised by the glittering aura of mystery around it. The spot suddenly grows, getting larger and larger, eventually blossoming into a perfect, pitch black... rose.

He picks up the rose and a trickle of ruby-red blood rolls down the pale skin of his fingers. A knife-sharp thorn shimmers maliciously in the hazy mist. He opens his mouth to cry out in pain, but he doesn't get the chance to make a sound. His eyes blared with blood red light. Everything shatters – the boy's terrified face, the wild gusts of wind, the white snow dotted with smudges of blood.

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The vision felt so real. It was like Rose was standing next to the boy, soaking up his petrified gasps and wails of pain. *"It's not real. It's not real."* She reminded herself constantly. But the iron-grip hold on her mind was slowly loosening. Reality and fantasy merged together, making it impossible to tell them apart. *"Stop!"* Rose told herself. There were much more important things to do- like memorising the Pythagoras Theorem. Whacking her two-tonne bag over her shoulder, she marched off to the prison – a.k.a school.

Silver icicles glimmered underneath the naked branches like iridescent chandeliers dangling from a marble ceiling. Rose inhaled the crisp winter air, the thick blanket of snow crunching beneath her leather boots. It was winter already. Summer seemed to be only yesterday – she could still feel the warmth lingering on her porcelain face. *"Hey, Rose!"* The voice of her friend, Mallory pierced through her thoughts. *"Are you going to the library to do your homework? I've already finished mine so I can help you with it!"* A tumble of blonde curls fell as she removed her winter toque. That was Mallory. Organised, helpful and beautiful. Why couldn't she be more like Mallory instead of an unorganised freckly girl with scraggly auburn hair? *"Roooooosse! Are you coming or not?"* Her bag bouncing behind her back, Rose dashed towards Mallory.

Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Tick, tock. Several hours passed like the chilly wind that was howling outside. *"Done!"* exclaimed Mallory as she leapt up from the chair, massaging her tired legs. *"I've had enough of this stupid homework research thingamobobob!"* Rose nodded, agreeing to her every

word. "Let's look for some books now!" said Mallory. Rose packed her bag and stood up. Her eyes couldn't read a single letter, not when she had enough maths equations spinning in her head. "You can wait near the door and wait for me while I get some books." With that, Mallory disappeared into the nearest bookshelf. Rose leaned on the white-scrubbed wall of the library. She could see Mallory dancing across the library, already a towering pile of books held in her arms. *Family*. That was the top book of her pile. "At least I have Mallory," Rose thought sadly. Since the first snowfall, her parents had been gone. There was no trace of them even at Winter Park, where they were last seen. She had tried explaining this situation to the police but they wouldn't listen. "Sure, sure we'll take care of that." They would say, not once lifting up their eyes from the papers of 'major' incidents. Everyone at school regarded her as an insane lunatic and left her side, leaving Mallory to reassure her as she broke into sobs. Rose shook her head in frustration. It was completely useless thinking about the past. With nothing else to do, Rose started wandering deeper into library. Deeper into... a world of *danger*.

"Come, young child. Let me help you. I am here." Rose skidded to a halt. Terror tingled down her spine like a knife scraping a rock. There was nobody else in the library except her and Mallory and judging from the voice, it wasn't Mallory's. "Ma...Mallory?" she muttered, sweat drenching her shirt. The welcoming heat of the library didn't seem so warm anymore. The shutters clattered against their frames. The floor seemed to pull her into a pit of eternal darkness. The pages of the books whispered like forgotten spirits, trapped in a cage of death forever.

"Mm Hmm?" Mallory's reply drifted through the tense air.

"D...did you hear that whisper?"

"What whisper?" called Mallory absent-mindedly. It was obvious that that she was engrossed in her book. The voice whispered again. *"Rose, look behind and find the book!"* Rose whipped her head around, her chocolate coloured eyes wide with paranoia. The books on the polished mahogany shelf in front of her distorted, blurring into a shade of metallic blue. All of them, that is, except for one. Rose, bursting with curiosity, stepped cautiously towards the book. A spark of electricity fizzled between her trembling fingers and the pure white leather cover of the book. An intricate pattern of tangled stems ran down the borders, eventually joining up to create... a black rose. Bemused, Rose gently lifted up the book, her fingers brushing against the leather case. It was smooth. Just as she lifted the leather cover to start reading, she heard someone call her name. Rose sighed heavily. She would have to wait until she was at home.

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The dim light radiated from the candle, creating a tiny island of light around the candelabra. The mysterious book lay untouched in the thin strands of moonlight slicing through the window. Rose stared at the book, brushing stray strands of greasy auburn hair off her forehead. It beckoned her to read it, like an invisible force pulling her towards it. Rose opened the cover slowly, as if it was a present. *Bong. Bong. Bong*. The echoing chimes of the clock tower reverberated through the empty house. *"It's too late,"* Rose thought, slipping into the cracks of drowsiness. Then her eyes closed.

Mallory finds a rose, a black one. As if hypnotised, she leans in closer to it. A stack of books tumble down as she reaches out for the rose. Rose stands behind her, screaming out for help as if her life depends on it. But it's too late. Black swirls emerge from the thorns as it enters Mallory's body. Everything Rose sees speeds up but her movements slow down. She reaches out for Mallory but she's too far away. She says something that Rose can't hear, but there is no mercy in her voice. Then the gruesome picture shatters into a thousand glass raindrops.

Rose immediately woke up, a shiver forming down her spine. It was another vision, warning her about something. *"Mallory."* Rose dashed over to her bag, packed everything that was in her way and left, the door slamming behind her.

Rose sprinted along the never-ending row of houses, every second turning into hours. *"Mallory, Mallory, Mallory, Mallory, Mallory..."* That was the only word that echoed in her head. Mallory picking the flower. Something dreadful happens. Whatever that 'something' was, Rose had to prevent that. Mallory looked up. In the distance, she could just make out the silhouette of Rillora Heights Academy. She had to be there in time. But it seemed impossible. She felt as if her energy was constantly draining out of her, as if she was leaking electricity. But she went on. Gravity was pulling her into the endless pit of darkness but she went on. Beads of sweat were dripping down her face but she went on. A clearer view of Rillora Heights Academy lay in front of her now. She could see Mallory striding across the school oval that was thickly coated in snow. In her hand, was... a black rose. Rose's eyes widened with a mixture of fear and despair. Despite the exhaustion, she bolted to Mallory, her legs moving slower and slower by the minute. *"Rose, it's too late."* A voice echoed in her head. It was as if a cold bucket of water was splashed on her head. *"Rose, don't come."*

"Mallory, please wait, please." Rose thought, fat tears spilling down her pale face. There was no reply. At last, she was a metre away from Mallory. Or rather what was left of her. Her black eyes were full of nothing but eternal emptiness and her strands of hair coiled like a serpent. Drops of black liquid were splattered on the ground. *Blood.* Mallory's mouth opened and said two words. *"Goodbye, Rose."*

(to be continued...)